Atatürk Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi 2011 15 (1): 215-226

Romantics, Ian McEwan, and the Identity of the Author[*]

Petru GOLBAN (**)

Abstract: *The study explores the different conceptions regarding the status and role of the author in both literary practice and critical theory from the romantic period through the nineteenth-century to the contemporary reevaluation of the producer of the literary work. By its expressive theory of authorship, Romanticism marked the rise of the idea of the supremacy of the author, the idea being challenged and surpassed by the nineteenth-century critical opinions, whereas the twentieth century structuralist and post-structuralist points of view proclaimed the death of the author. However, there are contemporary critical and literary voices, among whom Ian McEwan, who reaffirm the importance and omnipotence of the author against all emphases on textuality, the reader, and the cultural discourses by such critics as Wimsatt and Beardsley, Walter Benjamin, Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault and others.*

Key Words*: literary theory and criticism, literary history, Romanticism, expressive theory, objective theory, reception theory, language and textuality, intertextuality, metafiction, authorial authority.*

Romantikler, Ian McEwan ve Yazarın Kimliği

Özet: *Çalışma, Romantik dönemden on dokuzuncu yüzyıla, edebî eserin yaratıcısının çağdaş değerlendirmesine kadar,edebî uygulamada ve eleştiri teorisinde yazarın statüsü ve rolüyle ilgili farklı kavramları inceler. Romantizm, anlatımsal yazarlık teorisiyle yazarın üstünlüğü düşüncesinin yükselişini belirlemiştir. Bu düşünce, on dokuzuncu yüzyıl eleştirel fikirleri ile gölgede bırakılmış, yirminci yüzyıl yapısalcılık ve yapısalcılık sonrası savlar, yazarın ölümünü ilân etmiştir. Fakat, içlerinde Ian McEwan'ın da olduğu çağdaş eleştirel ve edebî düşünürler, Wimsatt ve Beardsley, Walter Benjamin, Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault gibi eleştirmenlerin metinsellik, okur ve kültürel söylemler üzerindeki vurguları karşısında yazarın önemini ve sınırsız gücünü doğrulamışlardır.*

Anahtar Kelimeler*: edebî teori ve eleştiri, edebî tarih, Romantizm, anlatımcı teori, objektif teori, okur, dil ve metinsellik, metinlerarasılık, üstkurmaca, yazar otoritesi.*

---

*) Bu makale, 19 Şubat 2009 tarihlerinde, Dumlupınar Üniversitesi'nde 'Hacettepe University – Dumlupinar University English Literature Joint Panel'de "The Identity of Authorship in Literature: from Romantics to Ian McEwan" adıyla sunulan bildirinin gözden geçirilmiş biçimidir.

**) Doç. Dr., Namık Kemal Üniversitesi Fen-Edebiyat Fakültesi, Batı Dilleri ve Edebiyatları Bölümü Öğretim Üyesi.
(e-posta: petrugo@hotmail.com/pgolban@nku.edu.tr)

I. Romanticism and the Birth of the Author

Despite the over-repeated forty-year old proclamation of "the death of the author" by Roland Barthes (1968), there are literary voices at the beginning of our new millennium who affirm in and by their texts not only the vitality of authorship but also the authorial omnipotence. Among these writers one should count Ian McEwan with his novel *Atonement*, published in 2001, the storyline of which has been successful as both fiction and film.

In order to better reveal this appealing aspect of our contemporary literature, one should widen the concern and add the diachronic element as to apprehend, first, the rise of the idea of authorship in literature. In this respect, and in Michel Foucault's opinion (expressed in "What Is an Author?", 1969), the idea of the author as an all-powerful creator of the text, which for this reason might be explained by investigating the life and thinking of the author, is a modern invention having its origin in the romantic view on art and literature.

Romanticism means subjectivity, the irrational of the human being, emotionalism, demonism, the new sentiments and attitudes towards nature; the romantic literature means also rebelliousness, escapism, dualism of existence; it also means 'romantic revival' as if to find a simpler way of living, less complicated than that contemporary to the poets, even though rudimentary or primitive, belonging to a disappeared autochthonous civilization. The emphasis is placed on human individuality and personality, on the values representative for humanity, on psychology, all of which ultimately being opposite to the pressure of a spiritual and intellectual conformism which the romantics saw as being determined by the rising industrialization that gave birth to our post-modern consumerist society. The romantic poets confer, thus, major significations to individual consciousness, and in doing so they lay emphasis on imagination, considering it to be the noblest of human faculties. The romantic writers and philosophers create a remarkable unity of the conceptions about the author and poetic imagination, including them into a larger domain of debates on poetry, language of poetry, origin and purpose of poetry, and act of artistic creation in general, as well as on nature and human spirit, reality and intuition, myth and religion, symbol and metaphor. This is familiar to us from Wordsworth's Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, Shelley's *Defence of Poetry*, and especially Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*.

In his celebrated book *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (1953), M. H. Abrams shows that the romantic period adds to the two existing since Antiquity critical theories on art – the mimetic and the pragmatic ones – a third one which is the expressive theory of authorship. The major critical concern is now the poet in that the producer of art has moved to the centre of critical attention, the true function of art being the communication and expression of the artist. The new romantic theory comes to identify the author with the writer, to proclaim the supremacy of the author in the relationship with the text and receiver, the literary work being understood as the

expression of the creator's own subjective and psychological states transmitted by poetic imagination.

Among the critical perspectives on this matter stand those of psychoanalysis, poststructuralism, cultural studies and other. From a psychoanalytical point of view, the rise of the authorship in the romantic period is what Freud will later see (in *Creative Writers and Daydreaming*, 1907) as a therapeutic activity in which the writer invests his own emotions and expresses his personal world of fantasies, thus playing with identity and improving his condition in the process.

From a poststructuralist point of view, the rise of the authorship in Romanticism is what the French philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard identifies (in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, 1979) as traditional narrative forms which preserve, convey and validate human behaviour. According to Eduard Vlad, these forms, as processes, from a poststructuralist perspective, "*do not only preserve, communicate and legitimate, they also "construct" human identity*". The point is that in these processes of either biographical, autobiographical or non-biographical writing, the writers *""construct", rather than "reconstruct" or "express" their identity, by selecting, omitting, foregrounding and expressing through language those aspects of their lives that would give meaning – and would justify – their existence*" (Vlad, 2005: 13-14).

From a sociological perspective, in Romanticism, the rise of literary self-reflexivity meaning the birth of the author amid the proclamation of individualism and the emphasis laid on human identity and individuality was as a reaction to the changes in social life concerning, in particular, the spiritual implications of the French Revolution of 1789 and those of industrialization. The latter represented the moment of the rise of our modern society, a society of human conglomerate, a mass-society fed and clothed by mass-production and informed by mass-communication.

From a larger cultural perspective, the birth of the author, as an aspect of the birth of romantic individualism, represented also a reaction against rationalism, the critical and analytical spirit, discipline in thought and the particular interest in the writing method and technique, all of these characteristic to the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, Empiricism, Rationalism and, in Britain, Neoclassicism.

The birth of the author in Romanticism, conferring to him the most important role in the creation of the meaning of the work by developing the expressive theory of authorship, meant a break in the linearity of the aesthetic attitude in the Western world dominated for centuries by the ides of *mimesis*, *catharsis* and *utile et dulce*. The birth of the author meant the rejection of the idea that literature is the source of instruction and pleasure, that the literary art is subject to strict rules, that its essence is imitation. Romanticism revolted against tradition and rules, proclaiming the freedom of artistic expression, the revival of innovation and the importance of the emotional and psychological experience. The birth of the author meant the establishment of his supremacy in the creation and disclosing of the meaning, which rejects the view that the author is a craftsman that observes and reproduces nature by the help of rules and the classics.

For the romantic writers, the author is a person apart, an individual whose imagination and sensibility make him be different from the others, and the text expresses the author, his inside, subjectivity and self-consciousness. In this respect, the confession, according to Andrew Bennett, as "*the revelation of an authentic authorial voice, identity, or experience*", becomes "*one of the dominant models of literary production*" (Bennett, 2006: 50).

In Romanticism, the confession, or confessional manner in poetry, evokes the author's own subjectivity, and in the way it was declared by Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) by the opening words of his *Confessions* (1770): "*I have resolved on an enterprise which has no precedent, and which, once complete, will have no imitator. My purpose is to display to my kind a portrait in every way true to nature, and the man I shall portray will be myself*". Although a philosopher of Enlightenment, Rousseau developed new approaches to subjectivity, influenced the rise of nationalism and Romantic Movement, and, with *Confessions*, founded the modern autobiography in which an individual is no longer reluctant to express personal emotional experience. Concerning the audience of the Romantic author, to whom he addresses his confession, it is human society, as for Shelley, or humanity in general, as for Friedrich Schlegel, who declares in his *Critical Fragments* (1797) that "*every honest author writes for nobody or everybody*" and that the author who writes only for a particular group "*does not deserve to be read*".

By its expressive theory of authorship, the romantics change the perspective of the approach to the work, which is from the concern with the audience and the effects of literature on audience to the concern with the author and his relation to the creative act, since the real meaning of the work results not from its relation to the receiver but from the attentive study of it relation to the author, the real creator of the meaning. The relationship between the poet and text came thus to replace the relationship of the text to reader, and, to better disclose the literary values of the text, the critic was required to live in the spirit of the author, to become his servant and friend, as for Johann Gottfried von Herder. For Friedrich Schlegel, the critic is supposed to evaluate the literary text not by a general ideal, but by finding the individual ideal in every work. Also, as it was believed that the origins reveal the real nature of the object, the critic should begin with what might have been the author's intention and to continue with judging the development of the intention in the whole of the literary work. As Friedrich Schlegel puts it, the critical act, in order to achieve the complete understanding of a literary work, implies a movement from the intuition of the author's intention to the intuition of the whole of the work.

II. The Decline of the Idea of Authorship in the Post-Romantic Nineteenth-Century

This romantic critical perspective of tracing the literary work back to its origins which are to be found in the experience of the poet, as part of the expressive theory of authorship, influenced much of the nineteenth century criticism and theory on poetry, as, for instance, the method of Sainte-Beuve, which is the biographical approach involving

discussion on both the work and life of the author: "*Literature, literary production, as I see it, is not distinct or separable from the rest of mankind's character and activity. I may enjoy a work, but it is hard for me to judge it independently of my knowledge of the man who produced it, and I am inclined to say, tel arbre, tel fruit – the fruit is like the tree*" (Sainte-Beuve in Harland, 1999: 78).

However, on the general literary level, the nineteenth-century meant the shift of the tradition from Romanticism to Realism, representing the shift from the personal and subjective to the social, from the individual to a complex social typology, which is from the individual as master of his destiny to a multitude of character types as social units, from the narrow circle of personal existence to the wide social panorama containing many and diverse social aspects and character types presented in social interaction.

Here one should turn from the issue of the rise of the idea of authorship to that of the decline of this idea, since, paralleling the shift of the literary concern from subjectivity to society, literary theory moved from the expressive theory of authorship to social theories of literature, where, according to Richard Harland, it was not until "*the advent of Naturalism that the claims of Realism were articulated in a theoretically confrontational manner*" (Harland, 1999: 81). One should consider in this respect the theories of Taine, Comte, Zola, and the entire spectrum of the nineteenth-century social and sociological approaches to literature.

However, the critical scene was much more complex than that: in the field of literary theory and criticism, apart from the romantic theory, which remained influential after Romanticism seized its existence as a regular movement from about 1830 onwards, the rest of the nineteenth-century saw realistic, naturalistic, impressionistic, aesthetic, historical, biographical, sociological, and humanistic criticism, offering an impressive typology that became more diversified in the twentieth century.

Much of this changed critical perspective excludes or, at least, diminishes the status and the role of the author, which is also due to the fact that the period after Romanticism, according to Abrams, developed a fourth theory on art: the objective theory on art, by whose standards art is autonomous, self-sufficient and serves no other purpose (moral, didactic, political, or propagandist) than the pursuit of the beauty, and should be judged only by aesthetic criteria. The theory, advocated by, among others, Gautier, Pater, Wilde, Poe, the symbolists, and other representative of the nineteenth-century avant-garde, is based on the idea of 'art for its own sake', art *per se*, the work being viewed as separate entity, complex enough in its constitutive elements, its range of symbols and imagery, and its patterns of structure and form, to be a matter of critical concern in itself, and without considering the other aspects of the literary system, among which the author.

Thus, dominant in the nineteenth-century expressive theory of authorship – according to which the work is self-reflexive and the term "author" is synonymous to that of "writer", since he holds the supremacy in the creation of the meaning of the work, the true function of art being the expression of the writer's emotional and psychological

states, the construction of his identity – is rejected and looses its primacy and importance as confronted by a number of other emerging theories.

III. The Twentieth-Century and the 'Death of the Author'

The final blow would come in the twentieth-century, in which the conventional identification of the "author" with the "writer", along with the supremacy and omnipotence of authorship in the creation of the meaning, were challenged by the textuality, focus on reader and cultural discourses of such critics as Wimsatt and Beardsley (in "The Intentional Fallacy"), Walter Benjamin (in "The Author as Producer"), Roland Barthes (in "Death of the Author"), Michel Foucault (in "What Is an Author? ") and others.

Thus, following the rise and the decline of the idea of authorship in literature, the twentieth-century marked the 'death of the author'. First, the rejection of the expressive theory of authorship and the questioning of the author's supremacy means that reader receives importance in the creation of the meaning of the work. From another perspective, the meaning depends on its relationship to other texts and, especially, on the relationship that the work establishes with other codes and types of discourses of a culture.

Concerning the reading experience, Wimsatt and Beardsley rejected since 1946 (in "The Intentional Fallacy") the function attributed to the author, the authorial intentionality, dismissed the author in general, the importance being given, instead, to the general knowledge, language and reader: "*The poem is not the critic's own and not the author's (it is detached from the author at birth and goes about the world beyond his power to intend about it or not). The poem belongs to the public. It is embodied in language, the peculiar possession of the public, and it is about the human being, and object of public knowledge*" (W. K. Wimsatt and M. C. Beardsley in Vlad, 2005: 10).

The expressive theory of authorship is also rejected by the textuality of Roland Barthes who, in his famous essay *The Death of the Author* (1967), written at the time of the birth of the postmodern period, proclaims the death, the total dismissal of the author as Author. For Barthes, as for Wimsatt and Beardsley, the death of the author is the birth of the reader: "*to give writing its future, it is necessary to overthrow the myth: the birth of reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author*" (Barthes, 2000: 150). The French poststructuralist declares that the literary text is "*a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture*", and, since the text's author is 'dead', absent, the text is produced by a 'writer' or 'scriptor', who originates nothing and expresses not himself but imitates "*a gesture that is always anterior*". The reader, for Barthes, is a function of the text, "*comparable to the whole range of implied, ideal, model, competent and super-readers that reader-response criticism has created precisely in order to find another centre for the works's – or text's – unity*" (Macsiniuc, 2002: 168).

The dismissal of the Author-God is also revealed by the distinction made between author and writer, by, among others, Glenn Kroft, for whom the author is a semiotic,

social and cultural entity, whereas the writer is the real owner of the writing practice: "*While a writer actually writes a text, an author comes into existence only after the work's publication and reception; in other words, an author results from a socioliterary process exerted on both the work and its creator*" (Croft in Vlad, 2005: 12).

Though the function of the author is rejected, when one brings into discussion the author as being a 'function', as Michel Foucault does, it is meant that the author does not possess a role or imply a relationship, but it is conceived historically and discursively. In his essay "What Is an Author?" (1969), Foucault considers the author to be a function of the discourse and not of a certain text, and foresees a future in which literature will circulate anonymously and the authority of the author and even the "author-function" will disappear, being replaced by other "constraints": "*I think that, as our society changes, at the very moment when it is in the process of changing, the author-function will disappear, and in such a manner that fiction and its polysemic texts will once again function according to another mode, but still with a system of constraint – one which will no longer be the author, but which will have to be determined or, perhaps, experienced", and the ultimate question behind all discourses, whatever their type, would be nothing "but the stirring of an indifference: 'What difference does it make who is speaking?'*" (Foucault, 2000: 186-187).

The existence of the author and the 'authorial authority', as an attribute of the writer, are still disputed, but there have been and will be authors that are not simple writers, scriptors, or modest scribers, but rather 'authorial' and 'authoritarian', confirming the superior position of the author and taking literature as a profession and vocation, not as a hobby.

Among them are those who embark on the contemporary intensive engagement with postmodern narrativization of history, historicisation of narrative, intertextuality, parody, and metafiction, thus acquiring distinct authorial identity. In the case of David Lodge's *Changing Places* and *Small World*, for example, metafiction "*draws attention to an increased degree of fictional self-reflexivity, by means of which the author abandons impersonality and detachment, foregrounds himself as an artist and also aspects of his own process of fictionalization*" (Vlad, 2005: 16).

Likewise, Ian McEwan, in his novel *Atonement* (2001), expresses "*a refusal to mourn the death, by poststructuralist theory, of the author*" and advocates "*the emergence of a master (of) narrative*" (Vlad, 2005: 249).

IV. Ian McEwan and the 'Rebirth of the Author'

A 'traditional original' that "*combines metafiction with psychological realism*" (Dyer, 2001: 8), Ian McEwan offers a polyvalent novel, which might be considered a family chronicle, a love story, a moral, psychological and especially a historical novel, "*evidently based on historical information and research*" (Strong, 2005: 163).

Atonement is a text having multiple intertextual references, such as Virginia Woolf and William Shakespeare, the novels *Clarissa* by Samuel Richardson and *Northanger Abbey* by Jane Austen, *Jude the Obscure* by Thomas Hardy and *The Golden Bowl*" by Henry James. Similar to McEwan's earlier writings, the story in *Atonement* is also tense, but "*the characters are more sympathetic, the atmosphere is less claustrophobic and human warmth and humour leaven the pain*" (Rennison, 2006: 265).

The novel *Atonement* is first of all a novel-meditation, a meditation on the status and role of the author in the world and in the narrative, and on the power of creative imagination facing real people and real life.

The protagonist of the book, Briony Tallis, is also the narrator of the story, the voice of the actual author Ian McEwan, the part of him that "*is in charge of telling the story of an almost tragic love*" and that "*appears as a seventy-seven-year-old woman who, perhaps, is telling her own story and that of her sister before she, the narrator, fades in an oblivion of dementia*" (Scott, 2008: 75).

Apart from being character and narrator, within the narrative framework, Briony is above all an author, a novelist, the creator of the narrative material, of the type which one considers to be a "*fictional author*" (Strong, 2005: 163). In this hypostasis, Briony builds her place as an author starting with adolescence, deciding to become a writer, namely a realistic novelist: "*Six decades later she would describe how at the age of thirteen she had written her way through a whole history of literature, beginning with stories derived from the European tradition of folk tales, through drama with simple moral intent, to arrive at an impartial psychological realism which she had discovered for herself, one special morning during a heat wave in 1935*" (McEwan, 2001: 38).

Briony, a highly imaginative and sensitive adolescent, is on the way of becoming an author by choosing those experiences that seem worthy "*of being turned into writing. When she imagines anything it is always to think 'how she might describe it' as a writer. The novel's catastrophe, for which she is largely responsible, is all the more numbing because she is always dreaming up little catastrophes that she might turn into writing. Wandering off to the swimming pool, she imagines finding her 9-year-old twin cousins drowned, and how she might turn what she found into words, 'the way they bobbed on the illuminated water's gentle swell, and how their hair spread like tendrils and their clothed bodies softly collided and drifted apart'. Working as a trainee nurse, she finds secret moments to fill her foolscap notebook with fictionalized elaborations of her experiences on the ward, as if the experiences were not enough*" (Mullan, 2006: 179).

Among all the experiences, the ones that reify the utmost disaster in the novel are Briony's unseen witnessing of a strange scene in which her sister Cecilia strips and plunges into a fountain, watched by Robbie, and the later encounter with the scene in which Cecilia and Robbie passionately make love, both scenes being transfigured by Briony's imagination, or rather re-created by her so as to develop into a narrative of 'crime' and its consequences, of wrongdoing and atonement,.

Moreover, Briony, the adolescent aspirant author, wished for a harmonious and organized world, and "*wished for it so fervently, in fact, that she could not imagine herself as an agent of chaotic wrongdoing*" (Scott, 2008: 77). Yet it is this exaggerated sense of order combined with the search for truth that will lead to a wrong social act, affecting in a negative way the life of those whom she loves. Robbie and Cecilia love each other, but Briony destroys their love; Robbie is thrown to jail and then fights in war, in which he dies; Cecilia leaves her family, becomes a nurse and dies during the bombing of the hospital.

Briony, the adult author and storyteller, in her seventies, after understanding the fact that she indeed has been eventually 'an agent of chaotic wrongdoing' and after assuming what she has done and its consequences, presents "*her youthful self relentlessly but with light humour – not with forgiveness or condemnation and not quite with compassion. Rather, she presents herself as she presents all events in the story, with implacable exactness in the details of flaws, mistakes, ill will, and weakness as well as in the details of honesty, sickness, strength, ability, and affection (...) She condemns no one. She justifies no one. She tells as severely as she can the story with its many enlivening "unscored dissonances" and terrible events*" (Scott, 2008: 77).

Meanwhile, earlier in the novel, when Briony parts from Cecilia and Robbie at the tube station, she promises to write to her parents and to lawyers and confess that she lied some six years earlier when she claimed Robbie to be a rapist. And it would not be a simple letter, but rather a new draft, an 'atonement', which she was ready to begin. And when the readers see at the foot of the page the initials 'BT' next to 'London 1999' they realise that 'BT' is Briony Tallis and that the whole of the book "*was Briony's story – her work of fiction. She has been writing it and rewriting it for the previous fifty-nine years. We find out that it has gone through 'half a dozen drafts'. The latest one is what we have just read. The novel is composed of this story and the metanarrative – the short final section – that accounts for its existence*" (Mullan, 2006: 178).

The idea of the novel's metanarrative emerges from the fact that it is "*the story about how its story comes into being*" (Mullan, 2006: 178), that the novel *Atonement* has as main character a novelist, or rather that it tells, like Dickens's *David Copperfield*, a "*'back-narrative' of how a character has become a novelist*", where in this case "*learning to write fiction is inextricable from a larger narrative of self-discovery*" (Mullan, 2006: 60).

Briony emerges as an author, the 'atonement' is her work of fiction, and "*for Briony to undertake her 'atonement', her work of fiction must make up for and confess the wrong that she has done*" (Mullan, 2006: 180).

Briony dedicates all her life to repair the consequences of her action, the suffering of those whom she loves, eventually understanding, as a successful writer at the end of her life and the end of the narrative, that there is no atonement for the acts of imagination,

no atonement for the all-powerful author as the master of fiction: "*how can a novelist achieve atonement when, with her absolute power of deciding outcomes, she is also God? There is no one, no entity or higher form that she can appeal to, or be reconciled with, or that can forgive her. In her imagination she has set the limits and the terms. No atonement for God, or novelists, even if they are atheists. It was always an impossible task, and that was precisely the point. The attempt was all*" (McEwan, 2001: 350-351).

Briony identifies herself with the all-powerful author, the God of the narrative world, but within the narrative material she is also *"a fictional character, a medium of distance for McEwan, a figure in a story whose truth is found in the telling*" (Scott, 2008: 80).

Not as a character, and certainly not as a storyteller, but rather as an author, be it fictional or fictitious, as one may argue, Briony remains, in the indifferent space of the novel, to be "*alive, if terminally ill, carrying the enormous responsibility of writing about her own search for atonement and finding in the writing no possibility for it*" (Scott, 2008: 81).

Author is God, the one that decides the destinies in real life, and an all-powerful creator of the narrative world, in both cases emerging the destructive power of imagination. Indeed, Briony "*discovered early in her life that by telling a story you could have a world, possess it by writing it down*" (Scott, 2008: 78). The point is that Briony, in her role as a fictional author, „*does want to act on reality, or prove the power of the reality of the fiction over the contingency and disorder of what people call the real world*" (Vlad, 2005: 291), but what emerges to be the 'true fiction' is actually false, because Robbie is innocent, but the author is omnipotent and her storyline, built on the individual and personal way of perceiving and thinking the reality, is that kind of narrative which does not only act upon reality but takes the place of reality.

The author has the power to control both the world and the fiction, and the narrative of the suffering of Robbie and Cecilia represents "the attempt" which "was all", the way in which Briony attempts to achieve atonement; however, an impossible endeavour because of her superior status as an author, her authorial authority, her power over the language.

In the end, Briony, the omnipotent and all-powerful author, on the day of her seventy-seven birthday celebration, is tempted to revive Robbie and Cecilia, to let them live and to unite them at the end, as "*a final act of kindness, a stand against oblivion and despair*": "*If I had the power to conjure them at my birthday celebration… Robbie and Cecilia, still alive, still in love, sitting side by side in the library, smiling at The Trials of Arabella? It's not impossible. But now I must sleep*" (McEwan, 2001: 351).

It is indeed not impossible for an omnipotent and all-powerful author; moreover, it is not impossible as "*Briony's novel wasn't yet published. She still had memory and energy. Might they yet come to Briony's birthday party? There's still space and time. McEwan gave her that. Before he closed the final draft and let Doubleday publish it. Still, in the novel there's an "ever" quality. It could have happened, it always could have happened*

otherwise" (Scott, 2008: 81). As an omnipotent and all-powerful author of a novel, Briony "*can make the world better than it truly is. She can make Cecilia and Robbie survive and meet again. And we must be allowed to believe it*" (Mullan, 2006: 180).

Although the temptation works only for a moment, as the old age and illness determine her to sleep, Briony Tallis – McEwan's fictional author – re-affirms, at the end of the novel, the power that the author possesses over life and fiction, as Ian McEwan – the actual author – himself does, the British novelist confirming the authorial position at the beginning of the twenty-first century despite the repeated apocalyptic declarations about the death of the author or the novel.

References

Abrams, M. H. (1953). The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Barthes, R. (2000). "The Death of the Author". Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader. Ed. David Lodge. London: Longman.

Bennett, A. (2006). "Expressivity: the Romantic theory of authorship". Literary Theory and Criticism: An Oxford Guide. Ed. Patricia Waugh. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Brooks, P. (ed.) (1997). The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Cahoone, L. (ed.) (2003). From Modernism to Postmodernism: An Anthology. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Dyer, G. (2001). "Who's Afraid of Influence?". The Guardian. London, 22 September 2001, p. 8, http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2001/sep/22/fiction.ianmcewan. (10.08.2010).

Foucault, M. (2000). "What Is an Author?". Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader. Ed. David Lodge. London: Longman.

Harland, R. (1999). Literary Theory from Plato to Barthes: An Introductory History. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Macsiniuc, C. (2002). Towards a Poetics of Reading: Postructuralist Perspectives. Iasi: Institutul European.

McEwan, I. (2001). Atonement. New York: Doubleday.

Mullan, J. (2006). How Novels Work. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Rennison, N. (2006). Bloomsbury Good Reading Guide. London: Huntingdon.

Scott, C. E. (2008). Living with Indifference. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Strong, J.; Dowd, G.; Stevenson, L. (2005). Genre Matters: Essays in Theory and Criticism. Bristol: Intellect Books.

Vlad, E. (2005). Authorship and Identity in Contemporary Fiction. Constanţa: Ovidius University Press.

Waugh, P. (ed.) (2006). Literary Theory and Criticism: An Oxford Guide. Oxford: Oxford University Press.